



PREDICTING COLD-WAR-LIKE TENSIONS: A STUDY OF PAST AND MODERN PROPAGANDIST CULTURE

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ABSTRACT

In the past, propagandist culture was used in the Cold War to fuel hate between ideologies of the Soviet Union and its economic communist system, and the USA and its capitalist economic system. As the Cold War was a time of vast development, this was delivered in a myriad of ways. Although these tensions are known to have ended in 1991, in our modern world, similar tensions are seen between the USA, a capitalist system, and China, a communist system. Thus, this academic paper compares and contrasts propagandist culture from then and now in the fields of nuclear culture, social culture/remarks, popular culture, and media. The paper found astounding resemblances between these two; although there were differences pointed out in terms of intensity and forwardness. This paper found that Cold War-like tensions can be expected in the future in terms of cultural impact.

KEYWORDS: USA, Soviet Union, China, Communism, Capitalism, Propaganda, Ideologies, Indoctrination, Culture.

INTRODUCTION

The Cold War cannot be forgotten when referring to significant wars in history. The Cold War was a major battle between two economic systems, communism, and capitalism, that had a major impact on the way modern countries shape their economies - and of more relevance to this paper - on culture during its time. One of the main assets in which people were brainwashed into believing these ideologies was culture, as popular forms of media, politics, literature, cinema, and other technologies were becoming everyday apparatuses. Although the outcome of the Cold War brought the victory of capitalism over communism and the debate had seemingly come to an end, countries that have stayed communist - such as China - have found raging tensions with capitalist countries, like the USA. As culture has been used as a powerful form of propaganda and a way of spreading ideologies in the past, the questions this paper asks are: Is it still an asset to fuel tensions between these ideologies in the modern world? Could it cause future tensions? How plausible is another Cold War?

Taking into account these vital questions, this research paper will test if the return of the communism vs. capitalism debate and other Cold-War-like tensions are to be expected due to the resemblance between modern and past propaganda culture.

Materials & Methods

This research will compare propagandist culture from then to the present to fully understand its effect on people and understand the general ideologies each of them follows, as well as contrast past and current propaganda to determine the extent to which their ideals still exist. This will aid in determining whether or not conflicts are still present. Sources used are mostly secondary and qualitative.

Nuclear Culture

The Cold War (1947-1991) saw technological advancements which were not only important socially and economically, but politically and militarily, such as nuclear power and weapons which increased the popularity of nuclear warfare. The Nuclear Arms Race between the US and the USSR promoted supremacy of such weapons and the ideology of 'the more nuclear power a country has, the more powerful it is'. This was a popular ideological manifestation that invested itself culturally in its people, leading to nationalism and militarism. The power of nuclear weapons in the modern world has remained, especially when discussing rising tensions between communist (China, North Korea) and capitalist countries (the U.S.). China ranks third in having the largest number of nuclear weapons, while North Korea also has a military nuclear weapons program. China and the US have had a tense nuclear relationship, motivating each country to build up its nuclear forces. The relevance of nuclear weapons has increased exponentially and is seen as a means of superiority. When comparing the two situations, modern and past, both situations have increased tensions when it comes to nuclear culture, although the past would be notably more as the world was on the brink of full-on nuclear war. Despite this, competition is similar, and the motives may be too, as both countries compete economically.

Social Culture/Remarks

'The Red Scare' was a phenomenon that was described as extensive paranoia of communism or a communist threat during the Cold War. It was expressed in a variety of ways, including social behaviour and 'McCarthyism'. People who had a different way of living were often labelled as communists and brought a wave of hate over themselves, which is why people in the USA conformed to 'All-

American' values and lifestyles. An example of someone being discriminated against due to their stance is Nikita Khrushchev's experiences on his trip to the USA in 1959. Additionally, humour during that time was directed toward disintegrating one another, such as 1984's 'We begin bombing in 5 minutes', from ex-President Ronald Reagan's sound check prior to his radio address to the nation on congressional inaction on proposed legislation. The Soviet Union had a complex social culture, with different eras bringing different social behaviours. Men and women in the Soviet Union lived by communist values and were forced to conform to these norms. The Soviet government, especially in the Stalinist era, advocated for a classless society and did not allow any opposition to it. Both sides discriminated against each other and wanted the other to only conform to their ideologies, which showed in their social behaviour. Even bad things were described as either 'communist' or 'capitalist'.

The discussion of social behaviour in the modern day is not as obvious as back in the Cold War, but there have been conflicting social behaviours that may not have directly targeted either economic system. Examples include stereotyping people of East-Asian descent, making fun of their accents (although this is more related to race than anything), and labelling anything made in China as 'Made in China'. Additionally, COVID-19 has brought widespread hate to the Chinese in America (once again, this may not be a direct hit on China's economic system), and ex-President Donald Trump has made comments degrading China. On China's side, Xi Jinping, China's President, has made remarks on how he expects Chinese people and private companies to fight alongside and abide by the communist party, which may not be intended to affect people socially, but it gives expectations that they must abide by communist values and behave in that way.

Popular Culture

Popular culture was used to implement ideologies during the Cold War and especially in times like 'The Red Scare'. Spy films and literature were used to spread propaganda on the superiority of the producing country, with the producing country portrayed as the 'heroes' and the opposing side as the 'villains'. Spy movies also influenced people to be more politically involved. Examples of spy/propaganda movies and novels include *Atomsk* (1949), *Red Nightmare* (1962), and *The Ugly American* (1958). Sports competitions between the Soviet Union and the USA were also used to indoctrinate people into believing the superiority of their state, which helped governments gain support for their actions. In the modern day, film and literature are not used to spread propaganda in a direct and obvious way but still are used as competition, but there are still some cases in which it is used for propaganda. For example, the Chinese propaganda film 'The Battle at Lake Changjin' (2021) was highly successful in China, influencing people's patriotism and creating a superiority complex of China over the USA. However, both China's and the USA's film industries have gone out of their way to compete with each other in terms of film, with the USA's leading position giving them the power to impose propaganda on not only their citizens but the world. Additionally, there are still tensions between the USA and China in terms of sports, such as Eileen Gu and Zhu Yi being American-born athletes yet competing for China. However, these factors don't promote propaganda directly in the way that was done back in the Cold War.

Media

Media was a major source of propaganda during the Cold War, encouraging slogans influenced by movements like 'The Red Scare' and imposing propaganda and bias in news outlets. Political cartoons were also used to comment on aspects

of the Cold War such as nuclear war, the Red Scare, political tensions, etc. All of this media was biased towards opposing states, indoctrinating a large group of people into believing their ideologies. Coming to the discussion of media in the modern day, China has been known to use the media to spread anti-American propaganda and bias in most of their news outlets, similar to the actions of the Soviet Union in the Cold War. Government control over the media, especially in China, shows the extent to which governments still aim to indoctrinate their citizens into believing their values and ideologies. In comparison, the USA has media freedom and a range of different sources which are known to be reliable and have less bias. Overall, modern propaganda media somewhat resembles that of the Cold War, although there is much less forwardness.

Conclusion

This research has found that culture can still be used to spread propaganda and create tensions, but cultural tensions are not as intense as that of the Cold War. Propaganda culture still exists today, but some arguments state that is much harder to indoctrinate people due to the variety of sources available to them. Other arguments state that modern technologies such as social media can be used to enhance indoctrination, which has been used by the two sides in the current Cold War-like tension. Despite these two arguments, the main conclusion collected from this research is that Cold War culture does resemble modern propaganda culture in many ways and has even adapted to modern technologies. This suggests that there still are raging cultural tensions between the countries and their respective citizens in a similar way to the Cold War, although not to the historical intensity. Analysing other important sectors and literature will bring a proper conclusion of what to expect of the future of these two nations.

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